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Wednesday, December 12, 2018 metro.us | t:MetroPhilly | f:MetroPhilly

PHILLIES SIGN MCCUTCHEN

The veteran free agent was signed to a 3-year, $50M deal. 15

1,000-plus rescue chicks enjoying new homes across the country. 8-9

'All aboard' at the Franklin Institute for Polar Express Day. 11

KEY TO THE CITY?

As SEPTA Key's implementation is nearly complete, some critics question if the fare system is leaving low-income Philadelphians behind. 6-7

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5 THINGS TO KNOW

WELCOME TO METRO PHILLY

SAM NEWHOUSE, REPORTER

Years in the making, SEPTA Key is here. And based on the 212 million SEPTA Key rides so far, and 1.1 million Keys in circulation, most commuters seem to like it. But some are concerned that low-income commuters without credit cards or internet access are struggling to keep up. You can buy or reload cards at 222 kiosks, 522 third-party retailers, nine SEPTA offices, and by phone or online; but despite all that, there are still hurdles in transitioning from the days of getting tokens at the corner store to putting all your fare on one Key Card. ***Read more inside and on metrophilly.us.***

VIRGINIA JURY WANTS LIFE SENTENCE FOR NEO-NAZI

1 A Virginia jury on Tuesday sentenced to life in prison a self-described neo-Nazi who killed a woman when he rammed his car into a crowd protesting two days of white supremacist rallies in the college town of Charlottesville. The Charlottesville, Virginia, jury urged a judge to send James Fields, 21, to prison for the rest of his life four days after finding the Ohio man guilty of first-degree murder and nine other crimes for killing Heather Heyer, 32, and injuring 19 people after the "Unite the Right" gathering in August 2017. The event proved a critical moment in the rise of the "alt-right," a loose alignment of fringe groups centered on white nationalism and emboldened by President Donald Trump's 2016 presidential victory. Trump was criticized by the left and right for initially saying there were "fine people on both sides" of a dispute between neo-Nazis and their opponents; subsequent alt-right gatherings failed to draw the crowds of hundreds of people that assembled in Charlottesville. Fields sat impassively, dressed in a light blue sweater and black-rimmed glasses, during Tuesday's sentencing.

AT LEAST 4 DEAD IN FRENCH XMAS MARKET SHOOTING

2 A lone gunman shot dead at least two people and wounded 11 others near a Christmas market in the city of Strasbourg on Tuesday evening before fleeing, police said. The motive was not immediately clear but, with France still on high alert after a wave of attacks commissioned or inspired by Islamic State militants since early 2015, the counter-terrorism prosecutor has opened an investigation. Interior Minister Christophe Castaner said the gunman was known to security services, and the local prefecture said he had previously been identified as a danger to security. People in the city's Neudorf area and Etoile Park were told to stay where they were as officers hunted the shooter on the ground and from the air. The European Parliament, which is sitting in Strasbourg this week, was put on lockdown. "There were gunshots and people running everywhere," one local shopkeeper told BFM TV. "It lasted about 10 minutes." The Christmas market was being held amid tight security this year, with unauthorized vehicles excluded from surrounding streets during opening hours and checkpoints set up on bridges and access points to search pedestrians' bags.

GOOGLE CEO SUNDAR PICHAI TESTIFIES BEFORE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

3 Google CEO Sundar Pichai testifies before the House Judiciary Committee at the Rayburn House Office Building on Tuesday in Washington, D.C. The committee held a hearing on "Transparency & Accountability: Examining Google and its Data Collection, Use and Filtering Practices."

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MANAFORT SEEKS TIME TO REVIEW LYING CLAIMS

4 Lawyers for President Donald Trump's former campaign chairman Paul Manafort told a U.S. judge on Tuesday they need more time to evaluate prosecutors' allegations that Manafort lied to Special Counsel Robert Mueller's team and breached his plea deal. During a hearing at the U.S. District Court in Washington, Manafort's lawyer Richard Westling said the defense team had learned more details earlier in the day about the allegations and was not sure yet if any of the issues were in dispute. Judge Amy Berman Jackson ordered the defense to file a response by Jan. 7 raising any concerns, and tentatively set a hearing for Jan. 25. Westling said he was not sure if a hearing would be necessary. Mueller's team in November accused Manafort of breaching a plea agreement reached two months earlier by lying repeatedly to investigators, and prosecutors on Friday for the first time provided details to back up their assertion. They said Manafort among other things lied about interactions with a former business partner named Konstantin Kilimnik, whom prosecutors have accused of having ties to Russian intelligence.

OAKLAND SUES RAIDERS, NFL OVER VEGAS MOVE

5 The city of Oakland, California, gave the Raiders a going-away present on Tuesday: a federal lawsuit. Oakland City Attorney Barbara J. Parker announced the suit, which alleges antitrust violations and breach of contract, and names the Raiders, the NFL and every other team in the league. While the city does not demand that the Raiders be forced to remain in Oakland, the seven-count filing in district court does seek restitution in the form of lost revenue, remaining debt on renovations to the Oakland Coliseum, court costs and fees, plus punitive damages. "The city will seek a resolution for the maximum amount of damages available," Parker said in a news release shortly before filing the lawsuit. "The lawsuit will not ask the court to prevent the Raiders' move to Las Vegas or keep the team in Oakland." One of the main cruxes of the city's argument is that the NFL's relocation policy is "skewed" in the favor of cities looking to get a team and biased against current host cities because each team shares a part of the moving team's relocation fee. The Raiders received league approval to relocate to Las Vegas in March 2017.

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NEWS

Trump, top Democrats clash on border wall in rare Oval Office fight

Sarah Sanders referred to it as "constructive dialogue."

President Donald Trump openly sparred about government funding with the top two Democratic lawmakers during an Oval Office meeting on Tuesday, throwing into question whether a deal was possible ahead of a deadline later this month.

In a remarkable public argument, the likes of which is seldom seen before cameras, Trump bickered with Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer and House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi about funding for the wall he has promised to build on the southern border with Mexico.

"If we don't get what we want, one way or the other — whether it's through you, through a military, through anything you want to call — I will shut down the government," Trump said as the heated argument drew near a close.

"I am proud to shut down the government for border security, Chuck, because the people of this country don't want criminals and people that have lots of problems and drugs pouring into our country," he said before reporters left their ringside seats.

Congress is seeking to finalize spending before some federal government funding expires on Dec. 21. While Trump's fellow Republicans control both the House and the Senate until next month, Democratic support is needed to pass any spending legislation.

Trump has asked Congress for $5 billion for border security, while Schumer and Pelosi said they offered to extend funding at current levels, around $1.3 billion. That is less than the $1.6 billion a bipartisan Senate committee has approved.

The meeting did not last long after reporters were ushered out of the Oval Office. White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders said in a statement it was a "constructive dialogue" and said Trump was "grateful" the cameras captured him fighting to protect the border.

Back on Capitol Hill, Schumer accused Trump of throwing a tantrum.

"The president showed what he really thinks: He wants to shut down the government," Schumer said.

After the meeting, the Democratic House fundraising arm immediately sent out an email asking supporters for money.

Pelosi, who told reporters she thought the Democrats had left things "in a pretty good place," said she had prayed with Trump during the private session, recounting the biblical story of King Solomon asking God for wisdom.

It was the first time Trump met with Pelosi and Schumer since the Democrats won control of the House of Representatives in Nov. 6 congressional elections — a rocky start to the relationship the White House will have with the opposition party, with which it needs to deal to advance any priorities.

"If I needed the votes for the wall in the House, I would have them in one session, it would be done."
President Trump

The fight kicked off when Pelosi told Trump that Americans did not want to see a "Trump shutdown," touching a nerve. Trump cut off Pelosi, arguing that he could not advance a funding bill without Democratic votes in the Senate.

"If I needed the votes for the wall in the House, I would have them in one session, it would be done," Trump bragged.

REUTERS

President Donald Trump (center-right) with Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY, far right) and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA, far left) as VP Mike Pence (center-left) sits in the Oval Office. GETTY IMAGES

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Karen James is a noted journalist who specializes in relationships, romance, and sex.

The Amazing Sex Secret of 78 Year-Old 'Italian Stallion'

"My husband shocked me with more sexual passion than he's had in years. He took me in the bedroom like we were newlyweds and gave me a night I'll never forget"

The Inside Story on Great Sex!

This week I got a letter from a reader about a "little secret" that has made her sex life with her husband absolutely explosive! (Those Texas women are spicy!)

Tina writes:

Dear Karen,

For years my husband and I had a great love life. He was sexy, passionate and so confident. But when he reached his 50s, he started to struggle with getting and keeping an erection. The few times we did have sex, his erection was definitely softer, leaving us both unsatisfied. He tried every product out there; prescriptions, creams, testosterone, male enhancement pills… but nothing worked. I know this is terrible, but I found myself thinking "My strong, passionate husband has become a sexual weakling." I had no idea it would all turn around in just 3 weeks!

Last month, he came home from a business trip in Europe and shocked me with more sexual energy and passion than he's had in years. Hard as a rock, he tossed me around the bedroom like we were newlyweds' and gave me a night I'll never forget! It was incredible and so exciting!

He flat wore me out that night and it's been like that ever since. His erections are so hard and powerful, they trigger the most intense, toe-curling 'moments' I've ever had! So here we are, enjoying the best sex of our lives… in our late-50's!

When I asked my husband what caused such a dramatic change, he said on his trip he stayed in a hotel room next to an Italian nutritionist and his wife. Through the walls, he heard them passionately making love every single night, and sometimes again in the morning. One afternoon, he saw the husband leave their room and he couldn't believe it. The man looked much too old to be having so much sex.

My husband couldn't help himself, so he asked the man his secret. The nutritionist smiled, introduced himself as Vito, and told my husband he was 78 years old, his wife 65, and that after 32 years of marriage, their sex life was as good as ever. Then he took a small pack of tablets from his satchel, gave it to my husband, and said "These come from a small town up north and are made from naturally pure plant extracts, packed with densely rich sexual nutrients. They will give you back the sex-drive you had when you were young, and make you harder than you can imagine." Then he laughed and said, "You'll become an Italian Stallion like me!"

Italian Stallion is right! These past several weeks have been a dream. My husband's desire for me is through the roof. He takes me whenever he wants, and he even wakes up most days with a 'morning salute' like he did years ago. I love it! He's a sexual powerhouse, beaming with confidence, and our marriage is stronger than ever.

Karen, here's why I'm writing you. The pack of tablets is about to run out and we desperately want more. I've looked everywhere but can't find them. Do you know anything about these tablets from Europe and how to get some here in the States?

Sincerely,
Tina C.,
Fort Worth, TX

Tina, you and the rest of my readers are in luck because I do know about these secret European sex tablets. Ever wonder why older men from Italy, Greece, Spain, and all over Europe are famous for staying energized, passionate and sexually active well into their golden years? Well, for decades, these men have relied on a unique blossom extract called Provarin to enhance their sexual performance and satisfaction.

Milled on the fertile northern plains, the key ingredients come naturally from pure extracts found along the Baltic Sea. Finely ground and pressed into tablets, Provarin has a legendary reputation throughout the European sexual underground for naturally fueling extremely hard erections, and a powerful climax. As Giovanni from Amsterdam put it, "It's like sexual rocket fuel, especially for us older guys!"

The best part from a woman's perspective, as you well know, is that the extreme hardness and ongoing power is enough to send us over the blissful edge! I found out about Provarin a few years ago when I was dating a cowboy from Wyoming. He took Provarin every morning and believe me, that good ol' boy sure rocked my nights!

All-natural and safe to take, Provarin is still a well-kept secret for those in the know and they like to keep it that way. It's an old-school, family business and product is still harvested by hand twice a year. They don't have a website and don't do any advertising. They don't need to. Long-time customers and word of mouth ensures their limited stock is sold out every year.

They do have a distributer here in the U.S. When I reached out to them for this article, a spokesman said they were proud to produce the highest quality product for men and couples. He went on to say that if any of my readers call to place an order today and mention this article, they'll get a one-time 50% discount, plus 30 free tablets, and free shipping!

Wow, so there you go, Tina - and the rest of you readers! Just give them a call today and mention this article. The number is **1-800-596-1925**.

Aren't you glad you asked?

Karen

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Some Pennsylvania riders still struggling to adapt to SEPTA Key

Concerns persist that longtime commuters without credit may be left behind.

SAM NEWHOUSE
sam.newhouse@metro.us

The Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) Key Card fare-payment system was intended to bring commuters to a paperless future, but some commuters feel locked out by the new system.

Currently, you can purchase the SEPTA Key Card and load and reload fares through the Key website, customer call center, at station fare kiosks, external sale outlets and SEPTA sales offices.

While cash is accepted at most of these venues, if you don't wish to pay for a Key Card, you'll always be paying the highest fare.

"You mean I have to pay a roundtrip fare to go get my Key, come back and catch my bus?" said a rider who asked to remain anonymous. Gripes about having to use a credit card for the website, travel to Center City, and concerns about costs are becoming increasingly common.

SEPTA says they are responding to all riders' issues, but acknowledged it will take time for everyone to learn the new system.

"As we rolled out Key over the last two years, it has been a very deliberate, phased rollout so that we could listen to our customers," said SEPTA Deputy General Manager Richard Burnfield. "The minimum load had been $10, we reduced it to $5. We provided 750,000 Key Cards for free to our customers. We initiated a $4.95 charge to get a new card, but if you register your card within 30 days, you get that full amount back on your Travel Wallet."

GETTY IMAGES

After complaints were publicized of some third-party retailers charging riders "convenience fees," SEPTA said they dispatched 250 "secret shoppers" to crack down on that practice, which violates their contract. No retailer should ever charge a convenience fee, they said.

For riders accustomed to picking up tokens at the corner store, having to adjust to the new system of loading and reloading a Key Card is a big adjustment. But SEPTA says by the numbers, Key is more convenient than the old system.

"When we were in the token vending business, we only had 52 token vending machines," said Leslie Hickman, SEPTA's chief officer for revenue operations. "Today, we have 222 fare kiosks and there are at least two in all our subway/elevated stations. That has really increased the availability for all our customers."

Nonetheless, some say the Key program's problems go deeper.

"There has to be a process used to help solve the problems of occasional riders, unbanked riders, low-income riders, people who don't have credit cards and don't ride in Center City," said Lance Haver, policy director at the Pennsylvania Save Our Safety Net Coalition. "Just announcing that they're going to have to adapt is unfair to the very people who have been riding SEPTA for the last generation."

Haver shared a litany of commuters' complaints, including the terminating of paper transfers and moving all transfers ($1 apiece) to Key. You can still pay cash for a bus trip, but you can't use cash to get a transfer — you have to pay double fare, Haver said.

"This is a tremendous example of elitism," he said. "They have not thought about how people ride and what people's lives are like."

Benjamin She, chair of local civic advocacy group 5th Square's Transit Committee, also said Key needs to be reconsidered.

"SEPTA stratifies a lot of its ridership into classes of riders depending on what mode they take, and I think they haven't thought about this in a holistic way," She said.

DAN KELLY IMAGE

"The fundamental lack of SEPTA Key vending machines and kiosks at more locations other than rail stations ... is a big oversight, considering that the majority of riders use buses in Philadelphia."

(The exact breakdown: 182 kiosks in all 51 subway/el stations; 20 kiosks at 10 major bus and trolley loops; five kiosks in two trolley stations; and five in Norristown High Speed Line terminals for use 20 hours a day. SEPTA's five Transit Sales Offices and four Center City Regional Rail Ticket Offices sell Key and related products.)

"SEPTA stratifies a lot of its ridership into classes of riders depending on what mode they take, and I think they haven't thought about this in a holistic way."
Benjamin She, chair of local civic advocacy group 5th Square's Transit Committee

She noted that Indego, Philly's bike-share program, accepts vouchers paid for with cash from chains like CVS, 7-Eleven and Family Dollar through a third-party financial company. The scattered 522 third-party retailers selling SEPTA Key aren't as convenient, he said. (SEPTA intends to eventually have a total of 1,500 retailers.)

"You definitely see a lot of barriers to entry even to use SEPTA in the first place," he said.

But SEPTA believes that over time, everyone will learn the ins and outs of the new system.

"Most of our customers get it, but we need help getting the word out to customers who are either struggling to understand it or need more information," Hickman said. "We want our customers to understand how to use the system."

SEPTA urges riders with questions about Key to talk to Key ambassadors at SEPTA stations, call the SEPTA Key Call Center at 855-567-3782 or visit SEPTAKey.org. If you still have problems, sound off to us @MetroPhilly.

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ALL PSPCA IMAGES

Chicks saved from North Philly lot find new coops

More than 1,000 chicks rescued from a vacant lot by the PSPCA earlier this year are all clucking happily in new homes.

SAM NEWHOUSE
sam.newhouse@metro.us

Philadelphia animal lovers were shocked back in September when more than a thousand shivering chicks were found by the PSPCA clinging to life in a vacant lot in Olney.

But there's a happy ending: The PSPCA announced this week that all 1,135 of the baby Cornish Cross chickens now have brand-new homes at sanctuaries and farms across the country, thanks in large part to efforts by Indraloka Animal Sanctuary in Northeastern Pa.

"When we first took on this task, it seemed impossible, but now have placed ALL of these birds," PSPCA CEO Julia Klim said in a statement.

The chicks were discovered in September, living in unsafe conditions that could easily have proven fatal for all of them. The PSPCA's Humane Law Enforcement, responding to tips of a massive group of chicks in the city, went to Olney to investigate. On a vacant lot on the 5500 block of Whitaker Avenue, just north of Roosevelt Boulevard, they found hundreds of baby chicks living inside an ad hoc shelter constructed of wood, chicken wire and a bit of tarp.

A veteran PSPCA officer said he'd never seen a discovery of so many chickens. The structure housing the chicks lacked the insulation necessary to keep them at a temperature of 95 degrees, which they require to survive through babyhood.

"We thank the individuals and 14 sanctuaries who've so generously accepted to give homes to these lovely birds."

Indra Lahiri, founder of Indraloka sanctuary

The PSPCA had to bring all the chicks to its Erie Avenue headquarters for urgent care, food and water, with help from staff and volunteers at the nearby Indraloka Animal Sanctuary, based in Mehoopany in Wyoming County.

While it looked nearly impossible at the time, three months later, every last chick is now thriving and growing into an adult chicken, adopted out to a range of individuals as well as to 14 animal sanctuaries in seven states across the country, including Florida, New Jersey and Washington state.

"We are extraordinarily grateful for the compassion and exceptional care the PSPCA has shown its more than 1,100 feathered guests over the past several months," said Indra Lahiri, founder of Indraloka sanctuary, in a statement. "We thank the individuals and 14 sanctuaries who've so generously accepted to give homes to these lovely birds."

The chicks, all Cornish Cross chickens, were forfeited by their original owner soon after the Sept. 15 discovery. The owner had returned to the lot while the PSPCA Humane Law Enforcement team was on-scene and explained that he had bought the chicks to start an impromptu farm and begin

a poultry business.

But the individual, who has not been publicly identified, had no license for any such agricultural activity. The lot, while vacant, was owned by a neighboring business. The individual in question further admitted that he originally had a batch of 2,500 chicks and lost more than 1,000 of them due to transportation and inadequate housing. (The PSPCA later charged the chicks' owner with a summary count of animal cruelty for ill-treating the chicks in question.)

"He had done some research on occupying vacant lots, and that was the impetus behind this incident," PSPCA Director of Humane Law Enforcement Nicole Wilson told Metro in September. "His thought was that he would find a piece of land, lay claim to that piece of land, clean off the land, and then put up this makeshift structure. ... You can't quite imagine the thought process that makes someone think this was a good plan of action. He really thought he was going to start this small farming operation in the middle of the city."

After the chicks were rescued, Indraloka began efforts to find them all new homes. They held two free workshops in October 2018 "to teach interested adopters about how to properly care for the chickens," they said, while fundraising for grants that would support sanctuaries that took in the chickens. Ultimately, the chicks went to a range of individuals and sanctuaries.

Six sanctuaries in Pennsylvania adopted chicks: Indraloka; Ashburn's Animals in Selinsgrove; Happy Heart-Happy Home Farm and Rescue in Glen Mills; Logan's Heroes in Greenville; Misfit Manor in Pottstown; and Lancaster Farm Sanctuary in Lancaster. The largest single-home adoption was made by Sasha Farm Sanctuary in Michigan, which took 128 of the birds.

"We have been overwhelmed by the outpouring of support from adopters and sanctuaries across the country, led by the partnership of Indraloka Animal Sanctuary," Klim, the PSPCA CEO, said.

While it is technically illegal for Philadelphia residents to keep chickens at their homes, the city has a thriving subculture of "backyard chicken" farmers who keep their personal poultry in backyard coops. Some have even gone to court and successfully beat city fines levied by civil authorities. But some businesses, like J&B Poultry in South Philadelphia, have been slapped with harsher fines and even criminal charges for animal cruelty at sites where live chickens and other animals are raised for slaughter.

The PSPCA, a 100 percent donor-funded animal welfare organization, asks anyone with information about animal cruelty to contact their anonymous Animal Cruelty Hotline at 866-601-SPCA.

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Pat King
Grumble Editor

FRIENDS WHO BORROW BOOKS AND NEVER RETURN THEM!

Something that always happens to me after completing a book is I immediately want to talk to my friends about the story I just finished. Well, let me rephrase that: I look for anyone who will let me go off about everything that excited me along the journey in annoying detail. For this reason, I usually end up letting people borrow books, so they can read and then return them so that we can talk about them. You know, so one of us doesn't look crazy.

But one thing that bugs me is when people borrow a book and then don't return it after months, or even years. I won't name names here, but I have one outstanding library loan to a friend that has not made its way back to me for some time. The late charges on this thing would certainly revoke a membership. I get that the queue of book titles can pile up pretty easily, and that carving out time to read can be difficult. But as someone who has books on my shelf that I have borrowed from friends, I have to say, knowing that I haven't returned them yet is like my version of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven" — it keeps me up at night! In summation, books that you borrow should be at the top of your reading list so that you can get them back, ASAP.

VENT TO US!
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SEND US YOUR HOLIDAY PET PHOTOS!

Calling all readers: We want to see your pets' holiday costumes! Whether it's your puppy wearing a Santa costume or your kitten wearing an elf hat, we want to see them! Send in your best photos to **humble@metro.us** and we will post them in this space.

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Please remember to send your Humbles to **humble@metro.us**. These submissions can be acts of gratitude, positivity or kindness that you have seen throughout the day.

metro.us/horoscopes

Aries Don't divulge a secret prematurely. Make personal changes that will allow you more options to travel or change direction next year. Check out your options and start the ball rolling.

Taurus Plan a trip or make arrangements for the festive season. Getting together with your peers will give you greater insight into the people you work alongside. Romance is on the rise.

Gemini Think big, but stay within your budget. Use your imagination to come up with a surprise that will thrill a loved one. An emotional issue can be resolved.

Cancer You will know what's best for you, and you shouldn't let anyone convince you to deviate from your plans. A personal change will do you good and boost your confidence.

Leo It's up to you to bring about change. Consider what you'd like to see transpire and make it happen. Doing a little shopping or getting together with friends is encouraged.

Virgo Visit someone you find supportive. Spending time with someone with more experience will help you view personal situations clearly. Personal relationships require time and patience.

Libra Plan outings, do things with youngsters or get together with a close friend or sibling. Don't let personal changes cause concern. Make the best out of whatever options you are given.

Scorpio You'll get an interesting idea that will surprise a loved one. A personal change will do you good and help you make plans that will improve your lifestyle.

Sagittarius Look at the big picture, but don't feel that you must do everything at once. You need to pace yourself to fit your budget, lifestyle and availability.

Capricorn Don't leave anything to chance: If someone wants to make a last-minute change, be prepared to counter with a better plan. Take control and keep things simple as you move forward.

Aquarius An emotional plea will be heard and dealt with appropriately. The changes you bring about will make a difference to someone you care about. Don't let someone's rhetoric faze you.

Pisces Don't share personal information with someone you don't know well. Pay closer attention to what you eat and drink. Health issues will arise if you let yourself get rundown. EUGENIA LAST

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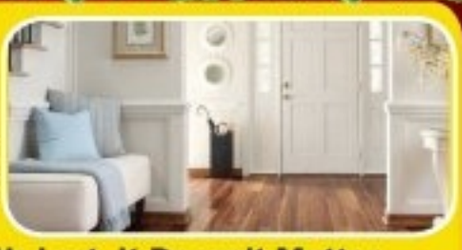

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LIFESTYLE

The Franklin Institute's Polar Express Day is this weekend.

MOLLY GIVEN
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The classic book and film "The Polar Express" are holiday favorites of all ages, and now the Franklin Institute is allowing Philadelphians to feel like they are part of the beloved story with its Polar Express Day this weekend.

Polar Express Day is a magical event featuring plenty of festive happenings, educational demonstrations and of course, a magical train experience to make the day truly special. Guests can climb aboard the authentic Baldwin 60000 locomotive and learn all about how the train works, how it moves and the difference between steam and diesel. Visitors will feel like they have stepped right into a scene from the classic holiday story and will love being in on the action.

Families will also love the other educational holiday-themed activities at the event, including the science behind the harmonics of sleigh bells and a look into why snowflakes and their patterns are all different and unique. The best part? Kris Kringle himself might join in on some of the fun. Santa will be available to take pictures, chat with the kiddos and spread holly-jolly cheer during the event.

If you've never had the pleasure of seeing "The Polar Express" or maybe want to rewatch the heartwarming tale, you are in luck: The classic film will be screened in the Franklin Theater on repeat for the duration of the event during Polar Express Day.

Santa Claus makes the rounds aboard the Polar Express. GETTY IMAGES

Children are encouraged, but not required, to come and enjoy the festive and fun event in their pajamas — just like the characters in the movie. Wearing your PJs also gets you a $2 discount off your museum general admission ticket.

So, Philadelphia, get ready to climb aboard and join in on a magical, educational and festive journey when you attend Polar Express Day at the Franklin Institute. More details on all of the holiday events at the Franklin Institute are available on its website, *fi.edu*.

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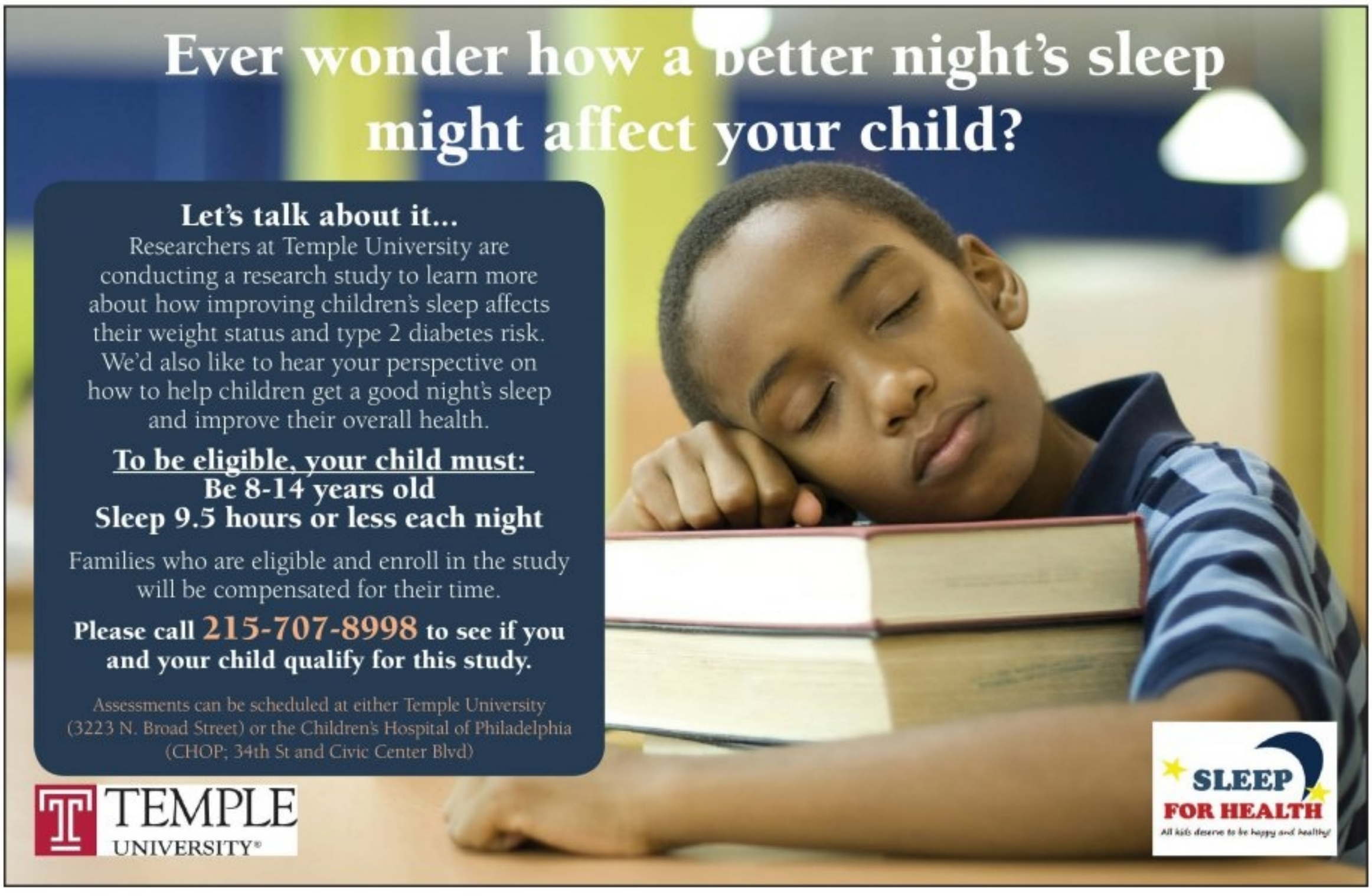
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Why Peter Jackson let his protégé direct 'Mortal Engines'

Christian Rivers oversaw the blockbuster adaptation of Philip Reeve's novel.

GREGORY WAKEMAN
GregoryWakeman@metro.us

"Mortal Engines" revolves around a world where cities travel on wheels. UNIVERSAL PICTURES

When Peter Jackson first picked up Philip Reeve's novel "Mortal Engines," he had no intention of turning it into a movie.

Instead, as an avid reader, he was just looking for another book to dive into. But once he'd put it down, Jackson was so enthralled by the dystopian tale, about a future where cities are on wheels and fight for scraps, that he just assumed another mainstream director had purchased the movie rights.

"I didn't even think the book rights would be available, because when you come to something that late you just imagine someone else would have them," Jackson tells Metro. "I just wanted to know who had the screen rights. I was intrigued to know who was going to turn it into a film. Was it going to be Spielberg? Or Paul Greengrass? Because I knew it would make such a cool film."

When Jackson found out no one had the rights, he immediately jumped at the chance to purchase them.

"I was like, 'Oh God!' Because I am imagining this amazing movie in my head as I read the book. So I thought, 'I'm going to be the one to make this film, then.'"

As his work on "The Lord Of The Rings" and "The Hobbit" proves, Jackson is quite adept at turning a book into a film. But it turns out there is one key reason to this success.

"The key to adapting is remembering what it is about that book that you loved the first time you read it," he explains. "Because by the time you write the script, you have read it 20 times and you have broken it down and the book is no longer the thing you read the first time. You want to make sure that it is the thing you fell in love with."

Jackson originally intended to direct "Mortal Engines" himself; however, ahead of writing the script, the Academy Award-winning filmmak-

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Philippa Boyens, Peter Jackson and Christian Rivers. GETTY IMAGES

er had a change of heart. He decided that it was the perfect time for his protégé Christian Rivers, who had worked alongside Jackson for the past 25 years — on the likes of "Braindead," "Heavenly Creatures," "The Lovely Bones," "King Kong" and every installment of "The Lord Of The Rings" and "The Hobbit" — to make his feature-film debut.

"We wrote the script for Christian to direct. I assumed I would direct it, because that is what I always do," Jackson says. "But during 'The Hobbit' we had Christian doing second unit direction and he has been with us for 25 years, he is part of our filmmaking family.

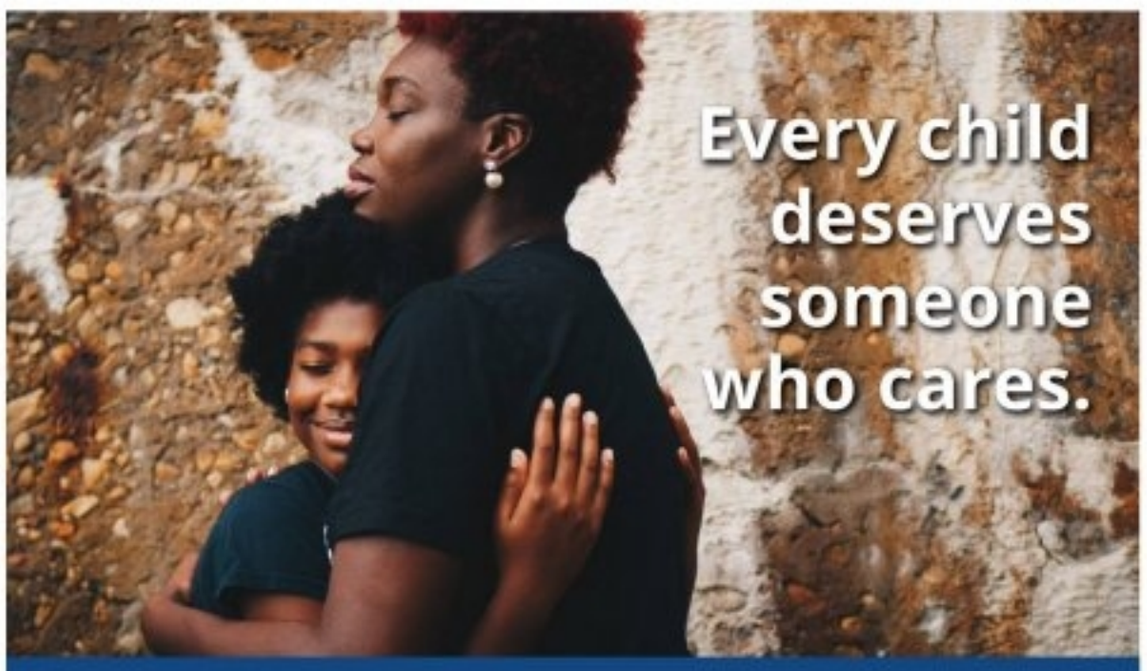
"He had become a really great second unit director, overseeing these complex action sequences with the dwarves and the barrels down the river," he adds. "I knew that 'Mortal Engines' would follow 'The Hobbit' and that Christian wanted to go off and do a feature film. I didn't want anyone else to do a feature film with him. It felt wrong. He [had been] part of our team for so long."

Jackson knew that Rivers was not only eager to make his directorial debut, but because of the amount of visual-effects work he'd done on Jackson's past films, he had the perfect skill set to work wonders with "Mortal Engines," too.

"It was the right time. I knew he would do a fantastic job," says Jackson. "And I would much rather he direct it instead of me if it meant him not going off and doing films for someone else."

"Mortal Engines" opens in theaters on Dec. 14.

Hera Hilmar as Hester Shaw in "Mortal Engines." MARK POKORNY/UNIVERSAL PICTURES



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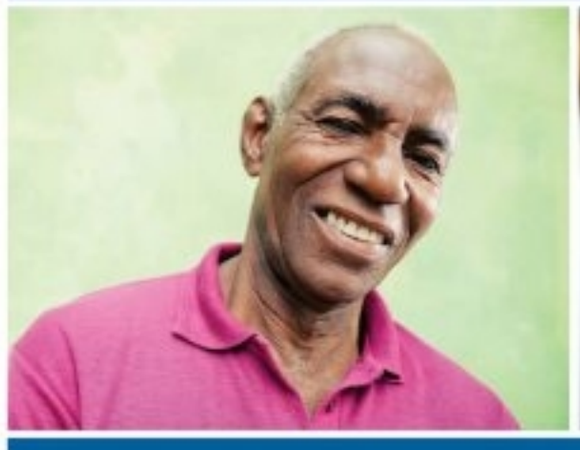

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A special screening of "Scrooged" will take place in New York on Saturday. PARAMOUNT PICTURES

How 'Scrooged' became a Christmas classic

Karen Allen celebrates 30 years of Bill Murray's irreverent take on Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol."

GREGORY WAKEMAN
Gregory.Wakeman@metro.us

Karen Allen never expected "Scrooged" to become a classic Christmas film.

Allen, who plays the ex-girlfriend of Bill Murray's selfish and cynical television executive Frank Cross — who is visited by three ghosts on Christmas Eve intent on reigniting his festive spirit — didn't realize the film's growing popularity until years after its release.

"It came out and I don't remember anyone thinking it was a cult classic or a classic Christmas film for the first 5 or 10 years after it was released," Allen tells Metro. "But then, suddenly, I just remember it would start to appear every Christmas on TV. And people would tell me it was their favorite Christmas film. It would appear on shortlists of the best Christmas films. Over the last 30 years, it [has] earned that position. I kind of didn't see it coming."

Why is "Scrooged" still so beloved?

But why has "Scrooged" remained so popular over the years, even though every Christmas seemingly sees the release of umpteen new holiday films?

"It built an energy around itself. It has a wonderful irreverence," says Allen. "It is based on the classic Dickens story. But it is irreverent with the material and the approach to how to tell a Christmas story. It is fun and not overly sentimental and also a great Christmas story."

It also helps that it is led by Bill Murray, who before the release of "Scrooged" hadn't shot a film in four years. In classic Bill Murray fashion, during this hiatus he had been popping up in the most random of places.

"I had met Bill maybe a year before 'Scrooged,'" recalls Allen. "I was working with a Shakespearean company and they approached him about some of the really great comedic roles in Shakespeare.

"Someone said he said he was feeling rusty at the time of 'Scrooged.' I didn't see it. Somebody said to me today that he was in Paris doing experimental theater before it. But I don't remember us ever talking about that."

Working with Murray also opened Allen's eyes to a brand-new way of approaching a role, too, as he introduced the actress — who came to film from the world of theater — to the impact of improvisation, whereas she had previously believed the script to be sacrosanct.

"He has this very kind of moment-to-moment energy, as all good actors do. It gets less and less interesting when it is predictable. We try to help pull each other into the moment and present. So we don't know what is coming next."

Allen was so insistent about never changing a word of the script that if a scene didn't work, she just assumed the fault was in her performance and not the writing.

"But with Bill coming from an improv and comedic background, he saw the script as a jumping-off point and springboard for new ideas. We improvised so much to make it fresh, and he would fill the scene and film with vitality.

"It is a real skill and gift. He allowed us to explore each scene anew. I can't imagine what it is like to be a writer and working with someone who isn't necessarily going to use the lines written. He often would come back to the lines, but only after using improvisation to attack it differently."

'Tis very much the season to revel in "Scrooged."

In fact, if you're in New York on Saturday, Dec. 15, Allen and Carol Kane are participating in a special screening of "Scrooged" hosted by the Academy Of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences at Metrograph.

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SPORTS

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Phillies ink Andrew McCutchen to three-year deal

The 32-year-old vet will be one of the Phillies' starting outfielders in 2019.

JOVAN ALFORD
jovan.alford@metro.us

Major League Baseball's Winter Meetings are underway this week in Las Vegas and the Philadelphia Phillies have made their first of potentially many moves.

Matt Gelb of The Athletic reported on Tuesday that the Phillies and veteran free-agent outfielder Andrew McCutchen came to an agreement on a three-year deal worth $50 million, with a club option for the fourth year.

In addition to the reported contract numbers, Gelb and MLB insider Ken Rosenthal both heard that despite adding McCutchen, it would not stop the Phillies from signing another outfielder (a la Bryce Harper). It does not come as a surprise to see the Phillies sign McCutchen as they reportedly had interest in him during July's trade deadline.

Ultimately, they did not get him as the Yankees swooped in and got him a month later for two minor-league prospects. In limited time with the Bronx Bombers, McCutchen hit .253/.421/.471 with five home runs and 10 RBI (114 plate appearances).

Before being traded to the Yankees, McCutchen was with the San Francisco Giants and did not look overly impressive. He batted 255/.357/.415 with 15 home runs and 55 RBI in 130 games.

There was a thought that maybe the veteran would come back to New York this offseason, but that idea was shattered when the Yankees re-signed Brett Gardner.

Nevertheless, with the Phillies, McCutchen will get a chance to play a huge role at either corner outfield spot. Over his 10-year career, he has experience playing in center field and left and right fields.

However, as they are currently constructed, the Phillies have Odubel Herrera and Roman Quinn patrolling center field and Nick Williams holding down the fort in right field.

But the situation in the outfield could drastically change again if the Phillies opt to sign Harper.

It should be interesting to see how things play out in Philly's outfield. As of right now, they have a surplus of outfielders and could look to use any of them in a potential deal for a pitcher, which they are in desperate need of.

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Bennett looks like Eagles' best offseason acquisition

Bennett is on the verge of having the best season of his career.

JOVAN ALFORD
jovan.alford@metro.us

In the offseason, the Philadelphia Eagles made a low-risk, high-reward trade with the Seattle Seahawks to bolster their already superb and tenacious defensive line.

The defending Super Bowl champs traded a fifth-round pick and backup wide receiver Marcus Johnson to the Seahawks for Michael Bennett and a seventh-round pick. On paper, it was a solid move for the Eagles as they were getting an accomplished defensive player who can play inside and outside on the line.

Shortly after acquiring Bennett, Philly released Vinny Curry, who then signed with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. The Eagles would sign a couple of more veteran impact players over the next few weeks, including defensive tackle Haloti Ngata.

However, out of all the players that were picked up, Bennett did not have a clear-cut role. Before the season began, he was projected to be a backup to second-year defensive end Derek Barnett.

This would be considered a step back for Bennett, who played 85 percent of defensive snaps last season in Seattle. From there, questions started to arise early in the season about his unhappiness about being a backup.

But to his credit, the veteran defensive end instead expressed happiness about playing with a good team.

"You always want to play more, but in this situation, you just want to win," Bennett said, per ESPN. "When you have a good quarterback, a good running game, you just want to win the game. We have a great defense, and I think for me it's just wanting to win a championship."

Eagles defensive lineman Michael Bennett has been a huge pickup this year. GETTY IMAGES

Fast-forward weeks later and it appears that the Eagles will not be playing for a Super Bowl. Bennett, however, has become an unstoppable force on a banged-up Eagles defense.

With Barnett undergoing season-ending shoulder injury and being placed on IR after the team's Week 7 loss to the Carolina Panthers, more opportunities were freed up for the 32-year-old defensive end.

In Philly's next six games, Bennett did not disappoint as he racked up 15 total tackles, 12 quarterback hits, seven tackles for loss and five sacks. Along with All-Pro defensive tackle Fletcher Cox, Bennett's name is constantly heard on Sundays, applying pressure and terrorizing opposing quarterbacks.

This was the case last Sunday against the Dallas Cowboys. Even though the defense as a whole gave up 576 yards of total offense, Bennett found himself constantly in Dallas' backfield.

In that game alone, he had seven total tackles, five quarterback hits (season high) and 1.5 sacks. To say that Bennett played an integral role against the Cowboys is a huge understatement as he had a key strip-sack on quarterback Dak Prescott in the third quarter to switch momentum in the Eagles' favor.

With that performance on the books, Bennett has now posted back-to-back seasons with at least eight sacks and could finish with 13. If he does get to that milestone, it would be a career-high for a guy who only made one start in the Eagles' first seven games.

Despite this season not going to plan for the defending Super Bowl champs due to a myriad of issues including personnel decisions, the Eagles' front office can hold their head high with the acquisition of Bennett.

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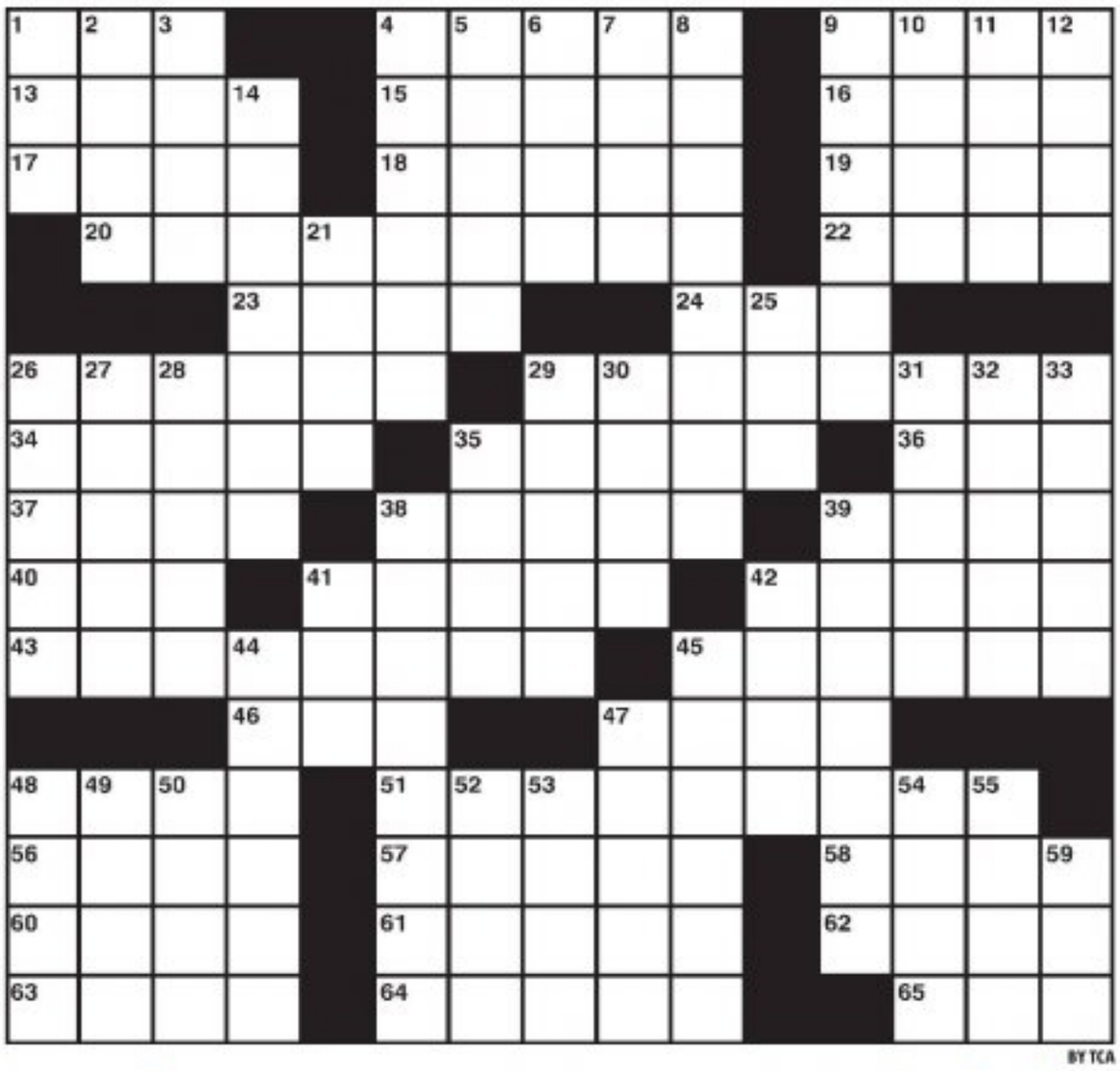

BY TCA

ACROSS

1 Beat walker
4 Domed cathedral recesses
9 Prepare spuds
13 Eager
15 Layered rock
16 Canyon sound
17 Place to buy salami & rye
18 Lively dance
19 Now and __; occasionally
20 In __; all prepared
22 __ Park, NY; FDR's hometown
23 Female animal
24 Contented sound
26 Money earned
29 Shockingly immoral incidents
34 Parts of speech
35 Skier's incline
36 Word attached to top or dog
37 Toaster attachment
38 Steeple
39 Puerto __
40 Donkey
41 Candid
42 Sire children
43 Young tree
45 Noises
46 Mr. Brynner
47 Money given to a borrower
48 As wise __ owl
51 Publicize an event
56 __ Raton, FL
57 Innocent
58 On the __ with; not speaking to
60 Skelton's Kadiddlehopper
61 Joints
62 Least desirable chicken part
63 Unexceptional
64 Valuable thing
65 Bashful

DOWN

1 Scoundrel
2 Go __; review
3 Heap
4 Have high hopes
5 Means of communication
6 Store event
7 BPOE folks
8 Ocean painting
9 "There's a __ to my madness"
10 Sore
11 Get rid of
12 Make sharper
14 Ring stone
21 Hoover & others
25 Small number
26 Peruvian Indians
27 Lasso's end
28 Use foul language
29 Injured arm support
30 Bottle stopper
31 Straighten
32 Added booze to the punch
33 Blemishes
35 Spick-and-__; very clean
38 Asian nation
39 Alumni get-together
41 Reason to call in sick
42 Tug or canoe
44 Bundle of energy
45 Most miffed
47 Embankment
48 Basics
49 Fly alone
50 Highest cards
52 Quayle & Aykroyd
53 Competes
54 Brings civil charges against
55 Carve in glass
59 Wild blue yonder

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Q	U	Q	R	A	T	P	A	C	K
G	C	A	E	S	A	R	S	S	N
U	N	E	W	Y	O	R	K	A	A
Y	J	S	Z	M	W	W	I	G	R
S	E	Y	E	E	U	L	B	E	F
L	R	E	H	T	A	E	W	V	C
L	S	F	J	T	O	N	Y	N	Y
O	E	S	I	N	A	T	R	A	S
D	Y	M	R	O	T	S	B	R	A
Z	D	R	G	X	R	Z	P	J	H

Blue Eyes
Caesars
Dolls
Frank
Guys
Italian
Jersey
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Rat Pack
Rome
Sinatra
Stormy
Tony
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R	A	I	N
O	M	E	M
O	T	H	A
N	N	O	N

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				1			7	
			8		4		6	2
3				6		8		
1			6		8			7
	3		5		2		1	
4			7		1			8
		6		5				3
7	9		1		6			
	4			8				

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A	S	A	N		M	E	N	I	N	G	I	T	I	S
R	E	V		S	O	A	K			L	E	E	D	S
		A	S	W	A	N			H	E	N			
T	A	I	W	A	N			M	E	N	T	O	R	
A	L	L	A	Y		P	R	E	E	N		C	O	T
S	L	I	T		G	L	A	N	D		S	C	A	R
K	I	N		S	O	U	N	D		S	C	A	R	E
	E	G	G	N	O	G			M	O	U	S	S	E
			L	A	D			N	A	O	M	I		
E	D	G	A	R			B	O	N	N		O	F	A
T	E	N	D	E	R	F	O	O	T		K	N	O	B
C	L	A	Y		A	R	O	S	E		E	A	R	L
H	I	T	S		M	O	T	E	L		G	L	E	E

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